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## A PIECE OF PATCHWORK.<sup>1</sup>

“I HOLD it to be a cardinal point in this busy world of ours,” says Dr. Thring, “that all who are in earnest should help each other, and that every person engaged in life-work should if possible appear at the call of a fellow worker.” I am here to address you in response to such call.

You will doubtless remember how much talk there was a few years ago about the best hundred books. Well, I confess that it seems to me that there are just three great books, and that the aim of all our schooling should be to teach our scholars how to read them aright and to act upon their teachings. These three great books are the book of nature, the book of art, and the book of life. I am well aware that this classification is open to criticism. In its broadest acceptance the book of nature—that is if we include human nature (and why should we not include it?)—covers the whole field ; while on the other hand the book of life may with equal cogency be said to be all-embracing, since every interpretation of nature and all artistic expression are the products of our life-work. But let us not quarrel over definitions. Let us rather see in what spirit we are to read these books.

First, let us read them for ourselves, not merely hear about them from others. Thus only can we become not only learned but wise. For as Lessing tells us, “Learning is only acquaintanceship with the experience of others ; knowledge is our own.” Remember that the common-sense which we all prize so highly is the outcome of individual and personal experience. “A handful of common-

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<sup>1</sup>An address to teachers. The number of quotations justifies, I think, the title.

sense," says a Spanish proverb, "is worth a bushel of learning." Let us then read for ourselves the book of nature, the book of art, and the book of life, using the opinions of others merely as a commentary thereon.

Secondly, let us read them for our profit and for self-development. Let us never be ashamed of developing even though this involves, as it must involve, many confessions of past imperfection and error. The frog is not ashamed (or presumably would not be, were he self-conscious) of ceasing to be a tadpole; nor the butterfly of having risen above its greedy caterpillar phase of development. So much inconsistency is essential to progress. It was with this in his mind that Emerson said: "Suppose you should contradict yourself; what then? A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do." Remember that the inconsistency Emerson speaks of is that which is the outcome of development. Of this inconsistency be nowise ashamed. Lowell was right when he told us: "The foolish and the dead alone never change their opinions."

Thirdly, let us read them not only for our profit but also for our enjoyment. "No pleasure," said Bacon, "is comparable to the standing on the vantage ground of truth."

Fourthly, let us read them with modesty and humility; with a constant salutary sense of our own profound ignorance—yes, even the prize-winners among us. Sir William Temple has here a word in season for us: "Nothing," he says, "keeps a man from knowledge and wisdom like thinking he has both."

And fifthly, let us read them with reverence. "Reverence," says Mr. Frederick Pollock in his work on Spinoza, "will never be wanting from those who study nature with a whole heart; reverence for the truth of things, and for all good work and love of the truth in man." On the other hand: "The scornful spirit," as Mr. Stopford Brooke tells us, "is the blind spirit and the unthoughtful one; and to its blindness nature displays in vain her beauty and man his wonderful life; contempt sees nothing, and seeing nothing has no materials for thought. But he who bends in loving reve-

rence before the beauty and the majesty of the universe, receives its teaching at every pore."

So much for the spirit in which we should read. You will no doubt remark that, with a touch of that inconsistency of which I spoke just now, I am endeavoring to enforce the importance of a first-hand reading for ourselves of the three great unwritten books, through second-hand quotations from written books. But of course you will understand that, in urging you to learn directly of nature and art and life, I would by no means have you disregard the teachings of those who deserve to be heard *just because they themselves have done this very thing*. Let what you read in the written page be but the seed which shall bear fruit in your own mind. As Bulwer Lytton says: "Never think it enough to have solved the problem started by another mind till you have deduced from it a corollary of your own." Depend upon it, Sir Thomas Browne was right when he told us: "They do most by books, who could do much without them."

Let me now pass on to say a few words concerning each of our three great books; and first concerning the book of nature. The direct appeal to nature is for us in England associated with the name of Francis Bacon, who, though he was "weak in science," was "strong in the philosophy which sought its materials in science." He was, as George Henry Lewes said, "rather one who sounded the trumpet-call than one who marshalled the troops." And over his work may be written his own words: "Man, the servant and interpreter of nature, can act and understand no further than he has, by work or contemplation, observed the method of nature."

What, then, are the cardinal teachings of the book of nature? Sir Thomas Browne, the span of whose life overlapped that of Bacon's by some twenty years, shall answer this question. "There is," he says, "no liberty for causes to operate in a loose and straggling way; nor any effect whatsoever but hath its warrant from some universal or superior cause." Or if you would have a more modern answer, let Emerson be called upon to speak: "Man," he tells us, "has learned to weigh the sun, and its weight neither loses nor gains. The path of a star, the moment of an eclipse, can be

determined to the fraction of a second. Well, to him the book of history, the book of love, the lures of passion, and the commandments of duty, are opened: and the next lesson taught, is the continuation of the inflexible law of matter into the subtle kingdom of will, and of thought; that, if in sidereal ages, gravity and projection keep their craft, and the ball never loses its way in its wild path through space—a secreter gravitation, a secreter projection, rule not less tyrannically in human history, and keep the balance of power from age to age unbroken. Religion or worship in the attitude of those who see this unity, intimacy, and sincerity; who see that, against all appearances, the nature of things works for truth and right forever.” Does it perhaps seem that there is a want of connexion between the reign of law so graphically indicated in the first part of this quotation and the religious attitude of its close? If so, I think it is because you have read nature too superficially. If the first lesson of nature is the inflexibility of law, the second lesson of nature, if not for the man of science at any rate to the philosopher, is that which has been stated in a thousand ways, but by none more tersely than by Schelling when he says: “Nature is visible spirit; spirit is invisible nature.” The American divine, Theodore Parker, gives utterance to the same thought, in language touched with religious emotion, when he says: “The Universe, broad and deep and high, is a handful of dust which God enchants. He is the mysterious magic which possesses the world.” And Dr. James Martineau has a realising sense of this second lesson in the teaching of nature when he exclaims: “Beneath the dome of this universe, we cannot stand where the musings of the eternal mind do not murmur round us and the visions of his loving thought appear.” Half truths are proverbially dangerous. If we trace forward into the domain of mind that universality of law which was first taught us through the study of nature, we must also trace backward into the material universe that informing spirit, the same in essence but different in manifestation, which is the very soul of our mental life. This, as it seems to me, is the teaching of the book of nature.

And so I pass to art. Here lack of time forces me to dwell not on the outer form but on the inner spirit. “Great art,” says Ruskin,

“is the expression of the mind of a great man, and mean art, that of the want of mind of a weak man.” And again speaking of one of Turner’s paintings he says: “The picture contains for us just that which its maker had in him to give; and can convey it to us, just so far as we are of the temper in which it must be received.” It is the human mind-element at the back of the art product to which we must pierce in our reading of the book of art. Browning knew and taught us this:

“For, don’t you mark? we’re made so that we love.  
First when we see them painted, things we have passed  
Perhaps a hundred times, nor cared to see;  
And so they are better, painted—better to us  
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;  
God uses us to help each other so,  
Lending our minds out.”

Art reveals; and its revelation is twofold. It reveals nature, and it reveals the artist as an interpreter of nature. In reading the book of art, then, you are getting closer to the spirit of nature, and you are communing with a human soul. Miss no opportunity of such goodly and ennobling communion. Make the artist reveal himself to you in the symphony, the poem, the painting, the chiselled marble, the cathedral aisle. Goethe gives us good advice in his “Wilhelm Meister.” “One ought,” he says, “every day at least to hear a little song, read a good poem, see a fine picture, and, if it were possible,”—how much there lies in those four words!—“if it were possible, to speak a few reasonable words.” Note well—“a *few* reasonable words” is the utmost that can be expected. What a reproach to some of us who are bubbling over all day long with much noise and much froth! Was it not Pope who said: “It is with narrow-souled people as with narrow-necked bottles; the less they have in them the more noise they make in pouring it out”?

Do not be ashamed of hearty admiration as you read the book of art. There is a silly modern habit, bred of supercilious inanity; a habit of feigned indifference in the presence of great art. Carlyle was truer to human nature at its best when he said: “It is the very joy of man’s heart to admire where he can; nothing so lifts him

from all his mean imprisonments, were it but for moments, as true admiration." The more you read of this book the more will your life-work be ennobled. "For the narrow mind," says Goethe, "whatever he attempts is still a trade; for the higher an art; and the highest, in doing one thing, does all; or, to speak less paradoxically, in the one thing which he does rightly, he sees the likeness of all that is done rightly."

And so we pass to the book of life. It is a book we must all read for better, for worse. Through it we get our final and most searching schooling. Speaking, I think, of Stirling, Carlyle says: "To him and to all of us, the expressly appointed schoolmasters and schoolings we get are as nothing, compared with the unappointed incidental and continual ones, whose school hours are all the days and nights of our existence, and whose lessons, noticed or unnoticed, stream in upon us with every breath we draw." "We accompany the youth," says Emerson, "with sympathy, and manifold old sayings of the wise, to the gate of the arena, but 'tis certain that not by strength of ours, or of the old sayings, but only by strength of his own, unknown to us or to any, he must stand or fall." How much then depends on what faculties in the youth we have trained and educated! Bad for us indeed, if Ruskin's sweeping indictment of us all is true. "The main thing," he says, "which we ought to teach our youth is to *see* something—all that the eyes which God has given him are capable of seeing. The sum of what we *do* teach them is to *say* something."

The book of life is one that deals with action and strenuous endeavor; and its teaching is that we too should be active. Be up and doing what is good and useful, is its continual burden. "To get good," says Dr. Martineau, "is animal; to do good is human; to be good is divine." "A man's true wealth," we read in one of the sacred books of the East, "is the good he does in this world. When he dies mortals will ask what property has he left behind him; but angels will inquire, 'What good deeds hast thou sent before thee?' Terrible is the picture drawn in another Oriental parable. "In a region of black cold wandered a soul which had departed from the earth; and there stood before him a hideous woman,

profligate and deformed. 'Who art thou?' he cried. To him she answered: 'I am thine own actions.'" These are the words of allegory. But do we not all constantly stumble on our own deeds, stalking abroad in this work-a-day world, and meeting us with reproaches or with smiles?

I am speaking to many whose life-work is, or is to be, educational. Read the three great books; drink deep of their manifold lessons. Remember what Goethe says: "There is nothing more frightful than a teacher who knows only what his scholars are intended to know." In these latter days we might say that such a one is not a teacher but a text-booker. I think it behooves us, of all people, to realise the continuity of mankind—that which Pascal expressed when he said: "The entire succession of men, through the whole course of ages, must be regarded as one man, always living and incessantly learning." We, therefore, who are teachers, are educating not only boys and girls, not only young men and young women, but the mankind that is growing from age to age. As we ply the educational loom we are weaving the fabric of futurity. Every mistake we make, whether through ignorance or through carelessness, will leave a blemish in the final product. But on the other hand, as Ruskin says: "Every noble life leaves the fibre of it interwoven forever in the work of the world." To express the same thought through another metaphor, we are all partners in the firm which, when it originated long ago in the days of the monkeys, was styled, "Self, Sons, & Co.," but which, in our own days, has been incorporated as "The Society of Man—*unlimited*." "It is," as Burke says, "a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue and in all perfection. It is a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born." If our reading of the book of life do not impress upon us, first, the fact that we are all of us partners in the society of man, and, secondly, that each of us, as a partner, is in honor bound to loyally serve the firm in his own particular corner of its operations;—if it have not taught us this, we have been careless readers and have failed to grasp its lessons. "It has been said," says Goethe, "and over

again said, 'Where I am well is my country!' But this consolatory saw were better worded: Where I am useful is my country! And now if I say," he continues, "Let each endeavor everywhere to be of use to himself and others, this is not a precept, or a counsel, but the utterance of life itself."

Lastly, remember that there are two stages in our life's education; first, an imitative stage, and, secondly, a stage of originality. The first is an essential preliminary to the second. "It is only the imitative mind," said Winwood Reade, "which can attain originality; the artist must learn to copy before he can create." But do not be content to remain in the first stage. As Emerson tells us: "There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given him to till. The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried." Conceive an ideal of what you would be and bend to its attainment all the forces of your nature. Endeavor to become in vital fact the ideal of your conception. You are bound to fail; but only through failure can you deserve success. Therefore, do not be disheartened if, after all, the results of your efforts seem insignificant. Remember what Mrs. Browning says:

"Let us be content, in work  
To do the thing we can, and not presume  
To fret because it's little."

And now two more quotations, and I shall have fulfilled my task. The first is from the author of the *Euphues*. "Frame, therefore," says John Lyly, "your lives to such integrity, your studies to the attaining of such perfection, that neither the might of the strong, neither the mallice of the weak, neither the swift reports of the ignorant, be able to spotte you with dishonestie, or note you of ungodliness. The greatest harm that you can do unto the envious is to do well; the greatest corasive that you can give unto the ignorant is to prosper in knowledge; the greatest comfort you can be-

stow on your parents is to live well and learn well; the greatest commodity that you can yield unto your country is with wisdom to bestow that talent that by grace was given unto you."

And my last quotation is that quatrain of Sir William Jones's, translated from an Arabian source, which will doubtless be familiar to some of you :

"On parent knees a naked new-born child  
Weeping thou sat'st, while all around thee smiled.  
So live that, sinking in thy long last sleep  
Thou calm may'st smile, while all around thee weep."

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